

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 1331

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ESTC, BC

SUBJECT: BOTSWANA'S REQUEST FOR RIFLES

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT KHAMA HAS RAISED WITH THE AMBASSADOR THE QUESTION OF A CASH PURCHASE OF 400 RIFLES FOR THE BOTSWANA POLICE. ONE OF HIS SENIOR STAFF HAS PURSUED THE QUESTION WITH THE DCM, AND PLANS TO MAKE THE PURCHASE FROM THE MANUFACTURER THROUGH THE BOTSWANA EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON. IN VIEW OF THE PRESIDENT'S INTEREST AND IN SUPPORT OF U.S. POLICY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, THE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT THE MUNITIONS EXPORT LICENSE BE APPROVED WHEN SUBMITTED. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING A RECENT CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR, PRESIDENT SIR SERETSE KHAMA INDICATED HIS INTEREST IN A CASH PURCHASE OF SOME 400 US-MADE M16 RIFLES FOR THE BOTSWANA POLICE. HE RECALLED THAT AN EARLIER INQUIRY REGARDING SUCH A SALE WAS RESPONDED TO NEGATIVELY. HE TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT SUBSEQUENTLY THE GOB HAD TURNED TO AUSTRALIA BUT FOUND THE PRICE PER WEAPON(RAND 300) TOO EXPENSIVE.

3. THE PRESIDENT SAID HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE REASON FOR
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THE U.S. NEGATIVE REACTION SINCE BOTSWANA HAS NO ARMY AND NEEDED THE WEAPONS FOR ITS POLICE MOBILE UNIT (PMU) FOR

INTERNAL DEFENSE AND BORDER PROTECTION. HE STRESSED THAT BOTSWANA HAD NEITHER THE INTENTION NOR THE CAPABILITY TO USE THESE WEAPONS FOR AGGRESSIVE PURPOSES.

4. THE AMBASSADOR TOLD THE PRESIDENT THAT HE WOULD INQUIRE ABOUT THE MATTER.

5. THE PRESIDENT SAID HIS SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT (STEENKAMP) WOULD BE IN TOUCH WITH THE EMBASSY WITH SPECIFIC INFORMATION TO REOPEN THE QUESTION OF A CASH PURCHASE.

6. SUBSEQUENTLY STEENKAMP AND THE DCM HAVE DISCUSSED THE QUESTION IN SOME DETAIL. JUST OVER A YEAR AGO A BRITISH POLICE/MILITARY ADVISER DID A STUDY ON BOTSWANA POLICE NEEDS AND RECOMMENDED THAT THE CURRENT RIFLE OF THE PMU (350 MEN) BE MODERNIZED. THE RIFLES CURRENTLY USED, SLR L1A1, ARE BECOMING UNSERVICEABLE, AND REPLACEMENTS AND PARTS HAVE BECOME UNAVAILABLE THROUGH NORMAL CHANNELS. BECAUSE OF THIS THE BRITISH EXPERT RECOMMENDED TO THE GOB THAT THE SLR BE REPLACED BY THE COLT M16. IT WAS ON THE BASIS OF THAT RECOMMENDATION THAT CONVERSATIONS WERE HELD IN AUGUST 1973 WITH THE EMBASSY AND CORRESPONDENCE CONDUCTED BETWEEN THE EMBASSY AND WASHINGTON.

7. AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE CONVERSATION STEENKAMP ASKED THE DCM FOR THE ADDRESS OF COLT AND SAID HE INTENDED TO HAVE THE BOTSWANA AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON PLACE AN ORDER FOR THE REQUIRED RIFLES AND ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT FROM THERE.

8. IN VIEW OF THE PRESIDENT'S PERSONAL INTEREST AND THE APPARENT INTENTION OF THE GOB TO PROCEED WITH THE ATTEMPT TO MAKE A COMMERCIAL PURCHASE DIRECTLY FROM THE MANUFACTURER, THE EMBASSY FEELS IT IMPORTANT TO PRESENT ITS VIEWS REGARDING THE POSSIBLE SALE.

9. GIVEN THE BROAD BASE OF SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ENLIGHTENED POLICIES IT FOLLOWS, THE POSSIBILITY OF AN INTERNALLY ENGINEERED COUP MUST BE CONSIDERED MINIMAL. GIVEN THE WIDE DISPERSAL OF THE PMU AND THE CONSERVATIVE
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NATURE OF ITS BRITISH TRAINED LEADERSHIP, THE LIKELIHOOD OF COUP PARTICIPATION BY THE PMU IS EVEN MORE REMOTE.

10. IT DOES NOT SEEM THAT BOTSWANA WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY AFFORDING EXPENDITURES IN THE ORDER OF MAGNITUDE UNDER CONSIDERATION (GUESTIMATED AT SOMETHING UNDER \$150,000). ITS REAL GROWTH IS IN EXCESS OF 15 PERCENT PER YEAR; EXPORT INCOME HAS BEEN RISING AT THE ANNUAL RATE OF NEARLY 50 PERCENT PER ANNUM AND PROJECTED AT \$450 MILLION FROM MINERALS ALONE BY 1985.

11. BOTSWANA HAS A GROWING RESPECT FOR THE EFFICIENCY OF U.S. EQUIPMENT, WHICH IS ONE REASON THEY ARE TURNING TO THE U.S. INSTEAD OF RELYING ON EX-COLONIAL SOURCES. IT IS SIGNIFICANT IN THIS REGARD THAT THE RECOMMENDATION FOR AMERICAN RIFLES WAS MADE IN A SURVEY BY A BRITISH POLICE/MILITARY EXPERT.

12. IN THE BROADER VIEW, IT IS CLEARLY IN THE INTEREST OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF BOTSWANA TO BE ABLE TO IMPLEMENT ITS POLICY TO PROHIBIT THE USE OF ITS TERRITORY EITHER FOR TRANSIT OR SAFEHAVEN FOR ARMED INSURGENTS. THE PARA (P2) CALLS FOR THE DENYING OF BOTSWANA TERRITORY TO SUBVERSIVE OR RADICALLY ORIENTED GROUPS, INCLUDING AFRICAN LIBERATION GROUPS. GIVEN THE RECENT EVENTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO THE FORMER PORTUGUESE COLONIES, THE TEMPTATION TO USE BOTSWANA TERRITORY AGAINST RHODESIA, SOUTHWEST AFRICA, AND EVEN SOUTH AFRICA, MUST BE INCREASING. FOR BOTSWANA TO ENFORCE ITS PROHIBITION BY DETERENCE, IT MUST HAVE THE CLEAR CAPABILITY TO EJECT OR APPREHEND ARMED BANDS INTENT ON VIOLATING ITS BORDERS. SUCH A CAPABILITY WITH LIMITED MANPOWER IS DIFFICULT AT BEST. CLEAR EVIDENCE OF BOTSWANA'S DETERMINATION TO DEVELOP THE CAPABILITY WOULD BE PROVIDED BY ITS OBTAINING MORE MODERN RIFLES FOR ITS POLICE FORCE.

13. BASED ON THE FOREGOING, THE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT WHEN THE REQUEST IS MADE FOR A MUNITIONS EXPORT LICENSE FOR M16 RIFLES FOR BOTSWANA, THE DECISION BE FAVORABLE. SUCH A DECISION WOULD STRENGTHEN OUR RELATIONS WITH BOTSWANA AND SERVE BROAD U.S. POLICY INTERESTS HERE.

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